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ABSTRACT

A learning center is one area of a classroom that contains a collection of programmed activities and materials which can be used either to teach, reinforce, or enrich a skill or concept, or to provide information. Learning centers are a tool to individualization and can be of types: (1) a skill learning center or (2) an information learning center. A skill center is designed to enrich, reinforce, or teach a skill or a concept, while the main purpose of an information center is to provide the student with information and/or to enrich a skill or concept. Organization of learning centers is one of the common concerns of teachers as they work with this approach. There are many plans, and the best plan is the one that is most appropriate for the learning styles and needs of the students. The teaching style of the instructional leader should also be considered. Regardless of which plan is used, the teacher should begin use of the learning center slowly. Learning centers can be a beneficial venture for both the teacher and the student, and there are many resources available which can be of help to teachers as they work with learning centers. (A list of suggested readings is included.) (RC)

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WAYS AND MEANS TO LEARNING CENTERS

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Are you presently using Learning Centers in your classroom? Are you using Interest Centers? Are you using Interest Centers and Learning Centers? Do you know the difference between a Learning Center and an Interest Center? What kinds of Learning Centers are there? What are the required ingredients for a successful Learning Center?

What can you do about finding space in your classroom for Learning Centers? How can you organize your classroom so that many of the pupils can be involved effectively with Learning Centers during the same time period? What are some resources for obtaining ideas for Learning Centers?

These questions seem to be the ones that are most frequently asked by educators as they begin to use Learning Centers. Perhaps some of the answers to these concerns can be provided here.

What is an "Interest Center?" As Interest Centers are used, it seems to be an area in the classroom in which an activity and/or materials are offered to students. It is usually an optional type of task for students and is typically to be done "when a student finishes his work." In this arrangement, there may be many students who do not have the opportunity of working with Interest Centers.

A Learning Center, on the other hand, is more specific in its criteria. A Learning Center is typically in one area of a classroom and contains a collection of programmed activities and materials which can be used to teach, reinforce, or enrich a skill or a concept. A learning center may also be used to provide information. Learning Centers may be teacher designed or they may be commercially produced Learning Centers and still manage to retain the general idea of the center.

Learning Centers are a tool to individualization. The teacher who is beginning to use Learning Centers extensively is well on his or her way to individualizing instruction. Other aspects of individualizing instruction such as recordkeeping, evaluation, diagnosing, prescribing, and contract teaching can be natural outgrowths of the use of Learning Centers. A teacher may suddenly find with the use of Learning Centers that a highly individualized program is in progress.

There are two types of Learning Centers: a Skill Learning Center and an Information Learning Center. A Skill Center is designed to enrich, reinforce or teach a skill or a concept. In a Skill Center, several details need to be considered:

(1) diagnosis of student needs through a standardized test, teacher made tests or a combination of these or other diagnostic devices;
(2) placement of a student in the appropriate place in the center;
(3) sequential activities on task cards;
(4) appropriate materials selected to support the activities;
(5) evaluation devices, which can be built in throughout the center.

In Skill Centers, a pre-test can serve as task card one and the final task card in a center can serve as the post-test. In teaching a new skill, a helpful technique is for the teacher to be used as a learning station. Another learning station can be used as a reenforcement for this recently taught skill.

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The main purpose of an "Information Center" is for enrichment and/or to provide the student with information. Typically, Information Centers are utilized in such subject areas as Social Sciences, Science, Health, Creative Writing and the Arts. The main skill that needs to be considered in designing an Information Center is the reading level of the students. Placement in the Center may be made on the basis of interest, ability and needs of the students. The evaluation tool used can be one that is a general check on progress, such as an individual conference, class report, play, puppet show, or panel discussion.

In designing a Learning Center, there are essential elements necessary in order to have a complete center:

Station Card - General directions for using the center. Objectives of the Learning Center can be noted on the station card.

Pre-Test---- Can be task card one.

Task Cards - Activities for the Learning Center. Activities should be sequential and whenever appropriate, activities should be self-checking.

Materials---- Those items supporting the activities, such as tape recordings, records, books, filmstrips, newspapers, magazines, films, telecasts, games, maps or globes.

Post-Test---- Consider the needs of the students and the type of Learning Center in deciding on the evaluation tool. Evaluation devices can be built in throughout the center.

Eye Appeal-- Make the center as attractive and appealing as possible. Color, childrens' designs, and durability are all important factors to consider in deciding on the eye appeal of a Learning Center.

Learning Centers can be a time consuming task for a teacher. For this reason, perhaps we need to consider the rationale for using Learning Centers.

A Learning Center is success oriented. Students can work on a task until it is correct.

Learning Centers are non-graded.

Learning Centers are highly motivating to students.

Learning Centers can assist students in developing problem solving ability.

Learning Centers are helpful to the hyperactive student. Two activities have been legalized: talking and movement.

Constant feedback can be built in for those dependent learners.

Learning Centers can be a follow-up for a teacher taught lesson or an activity to use in place of a regular assignment.

Self-checking is emphasized.

Learning Centers can assist in providing enrichment activities for students.

Learning Centers can be used with any subject area.

Learning Centers can be used with one student, partners, or with a team of students.

Learning Centers can be used in a self-contained classroom departmentalized approach, a team-teaching situation or an open space classroom.

Learning Centers can be used at all grade levels; pre-school through the university level,
and most of all.....

Learning Centers can be fun.

Perhaps it should be noted that Learning Centers do not serve as baby-sitters, nor are they an opportunity for students to do as they please. Learning Centers are also not a panacea for solving all problems.

Organization of Learning Centers is one of the common concerns of teachers as they work with this approach. There are many plans and the best plan is probably the one that is most appropriate for the learning styles and needs of the students. The teaching style of the instructional leader should also be considered. Obviously, this organizational plan might change from year to year. In any schedule, it is vital that the teacher and the students know what they are supposed to be doing, where they are to do the Learning Center, why they are involved with the Learning Center, and how to do it. It appears to be effective when a rotation schedule is posted so that both students and teachers can view the organization plan as they work with the Learning Centers. There are various rotation schedules available:

A color coded tag board wheel identifying titles of Learning Centers, various groups of students and the time period each group of learners will be working in a particular center.
A pocket chart with names of students and Learning Centers labeled on file cards.
Tracking system using chalk board, bulletin board, or peg board.
Individual contracts.
Rotation schedule duplicated and distributed to team leaders.
Schedule posted on a chart.

Regardless of which plan is used, it is highly recommended that a teacher begin the use of Learning Centers s-l-o-w-l-y. One technique that is often successful is to begin the use of Learning Centers with a small group of independent learners; When the teacher feels that the system is working, then another Learning Center can be added to the program and another group of learners can begin to work with the Learning Center. This system allows everyone to experience success and does not put a great deal of pressure on the teacher to have a large number of Learning Centers developed before beginning to use them with the students.

What about space? Most classrooms seem to have limited storage and table space so teachers working with Learning Centers need to constantly be on the alert for space saving ideas. Storing Learning Centers in a compact way is one useful idea; i.e., task cards stored in small boxes, plastic sleeves or manilla folders. The use of boxes, cubbies or ice cream cartons for storing personal items by the students rather than assigned desks is an approach to use in gaining table space. There are several factors which should be considered in planning the use of space while students are involved with Learning Centers.

Quiet Area
Buffer Area
Audio-Visual Area
Sink Needs
Lighting Facilities
Traffic Patterns

Learning Centers can be a beneficial venture for all concerned; teachers and students. Individualization can begin to take place in a classroom through the use of Learning Centers. Working with other teachers is an effective way to utilize many ideas, use everyone's strengths and act as a time saver in the development of Learning Centers. There are many resources available on today's commercial market which can be a tremendous help to teachers as they work with Learning Centers. Most of all, Learning Centers can be enjoyable and very satisfying to all concerned, soooooo, have fun!

Some Means to Using Learning Centers
or
Suggested Reading

1. A Learning Center Is Handbook: Gingrich & Nelson, A Learning Center Is ....San Jose, Calif. 1972
2. An Activities Handbook for Young Children. Craft & Hess, Houghton Miffin.
3. Beginning Discovery, Champion & Hamilton, 1973
4. Center Stuff for Nooks, Crannies & Corners, Champion & Hamilton.
5. Change for Children. Kaplan, Kaplan, Madsen & Taylor, Goodyear Publishing Company, Pacific Palisades, Calif.
6. Classroom Learning Centers, Morlan, Siegler, Inc., Learmont Publishing, Belomont, Calif. 1974
7. Farallones Scrapbook, Farallones Designs, Star Route, Point Reyes Station, Calif. 1971
8. Individualizing Through Learning Stations, Godfrey, Lorraine. Individualized Books Publishing Co., Menlo Park 1973
9. Individualizing Through Learning Themes. Godfrey, Lorraine. Individualized Books Publishing Co., Meno Park 1973
10. Invitation to Learning 1 and 2. Voight, Ralph, Acropolis Books Ltd., Washington, D.C., 1974
11. Learning Center Guide, Gurske & Cote, Barbara Gurske, Sunnyvale, Calif. 1972
12. Learning Center Manual-Primary Grades. Gingrich & Nelson. A Learning Center Is, San Jose 1972
13. Learning Center Manual-Intermediate Grades, Gingrich & Nelson. A Learning Center Is, San Jose 1972
14. Living & Learning with Children. Paula Jorde, 1973
15. Planning Discovery, Discover New Ways, Hamilton & Fischer, 1973
16. Work Jobs, Mary Lorton, Addison Wesley, 1972